

TO RULE WITHOUT RULES: A REVIEW ON THE 'UNARTICULATED CULTURAL POLICY' IN HONG KONG

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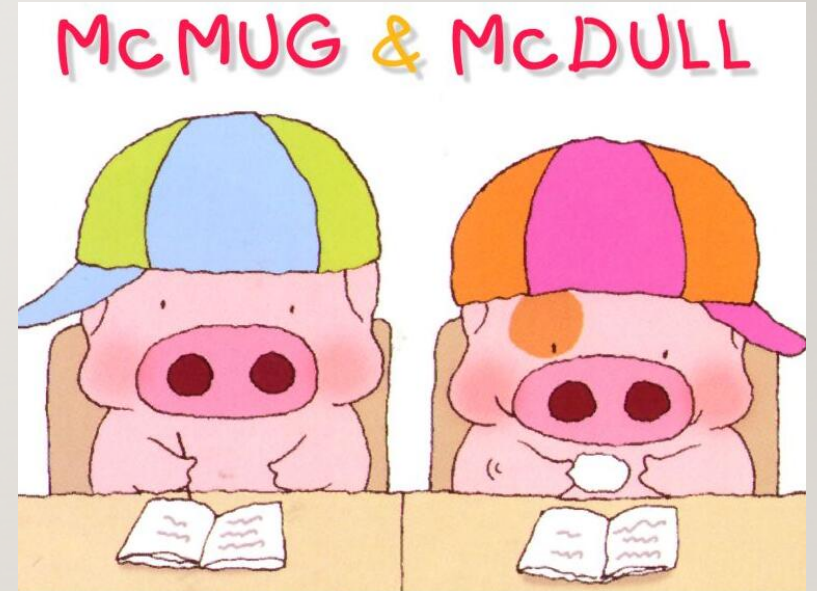
POP QUIZ: HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HONG KONG?



Celebrity Jackie Chan



A street performer in Mong Kok



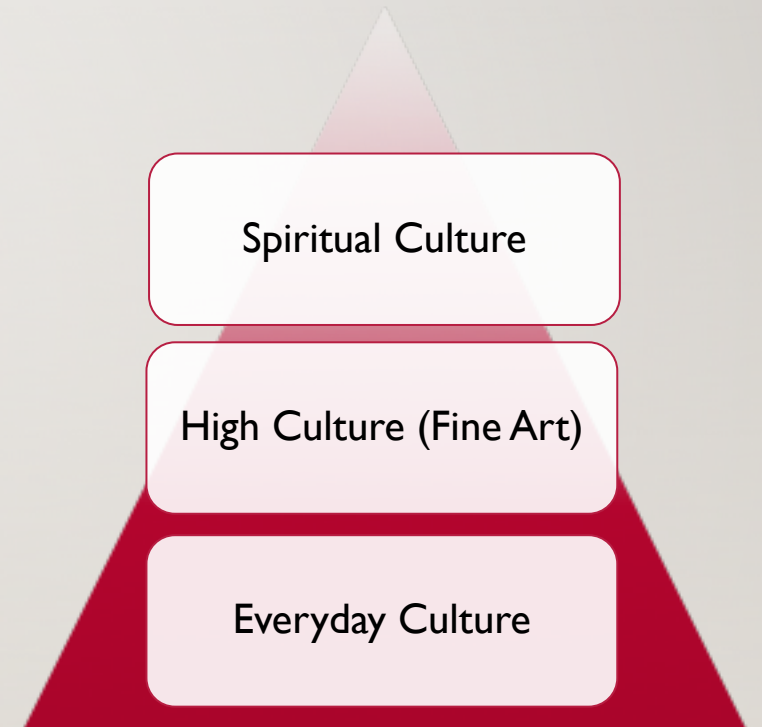
*Hong Kong Cartoon Characters
McMug and McDull*

AGENDA

- Introduction: What is the 'culture' you are talking about?
- History and Cultural Activities in Colonial Hong Kong (Before 1967)
- Cultural Policy in Colonial Hong Kong (1967 – 1997)
- Cultural Policy in Hong Kong SAR (1997 – today)
- Summary
- Discussions
- Q&A

WHAT IS CULTURE?

- There are three levels of culture that cultural policy can reach:
- Everyday culture: a summary of daily activities in a civilised society
- High Culture: Required a continuous education and training to understand and achieve
- Spiritual Culture: Ideology, worldview and moral



WHAT IS CULTURE?



Source: internet

WHAT IS CULTURAL POLICY?

- Just like any forms of policy, cultural policy always serve a specific politic objective
- Most of the criticisms about cultural policy in Hong Kong is the government failed to provide a clear definition of 'culture' and 'art'; In their documents, these two words are often interchangeable
- In fact, cultural policy in Hong Kong usually refers to the narrow sense of cultural: 'High culture' and ignore the other two levels (e.g. Academy of Performing Art, Art development Council)
- Mathias Woo, has criticised the government on numerous occasions saying they have 'no cultural policy'.
- How does it happen?



Mathias Woo,
Source: [twitter@mathiaswoo](https://twitter.com/mathiaswoo)

COLONIAL HISTORY OF HONG KONG (BEFORE 1967)

- There is no cultural policy
- Cultural activities (e.g. horse racing) only targeted social elites in Hong Kong (e.g. merchants, officials, professionals) in order to promote and maintain the social and cultural privilege of the British
- There is a lack of interests in ‘cultivating’ the public: the government did not support nor against local cultural activities in policy level



Happy Valley Racecourse, 1880

Source: <http://www.hkmemory.hk/collections/hkjc/racecourse/index.html>

CULTURAL POLICY IN COLONIAL HONG KONG (1967 – 1997)

- 1967 leftist riots
- Colonial government started introducing mega cultural events such as ‘The Festival of Hong Kong’, but the objectives were more related to confront the public and to celebrate prosperity, rather than nurturing Hong Kong culture
- Colonial government also deliberately ignore art critics, art research and humanity education, to prevent people to develop a critical thinking and collective identity which may challenge the British governance



Leftist riot in 1967



Festival of Hong Kong, 1969

CULTURAL POLICY IN COLONIAL HONG KONG (1967 – 1997)

- After 1967 riots, religious groups and youth organisations such as YMCA, were supported by the colonial government that to provide cultural activities in Hong Kong, such as free English class as a political bargain with the ‘leftist/communist labour unions’
- Together with the establishment of the City Hall and government funded public library, ‘cultural democracy’ began in Hong Kong
- For commercial culture, the colonial government deliberately stood on a non-intervention position to differentiate itself with China, and other communist bloc countries



Hong Kong City Hall, 1962



Cultural Revolution in China, 1966

CULTURAL POLICY IN COLONIAL HONG KONG (1967 – 1997)

- These groups were led by the British social elite in Hong Kong, therefore the cultural activities that they promoted were mostly Western ‘high culture’
- The imbalance between Western ‘high culture’ and Chinese culture experience lowered the cultural dignity of Chinese culture in Hong Kong (even in nowadays)



*British tea and Chinese tea (dim sum),
which one is more culturally superior?*

THE BEGINNING OF 'REACTIVE POLICY'

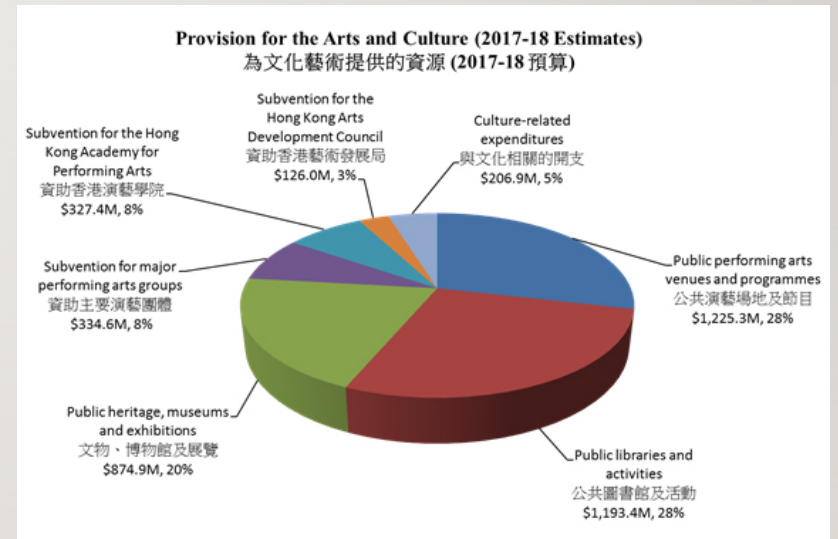
- With the change of economic structure from industrial economy to service economy, 'Hong Kong Art Festival' was established in 1977, aimed to promote international tourism
- The event was so successful that facilitated the birth of 'Asian Art Festival' and 'Hong Kong International Film Festival' in the following years



The 45th Hong Kong Art Festival, 2017

THE BEGINNING OF 'REACTIVE POLICY'

- Cultural policy became a 'reactive policy' that the government invested a short term budget in selective community upon requested
- Rather than directly sponsor the programme, the government inject funding into district councils or art community, following the 'arm's length principle'.
- However, the relationship between the government and cultural groups did not bonded by any specific policy but only as a moral duty / political mission



Provision for Art and Culture (2017 -2018)
Source: Home Affairs Bureau, HKSAR

THE BEGINNING OF 'REACTIVE POLICY'

- This strategy continues from 1980s – 1997, but in a larger budget and a more systematic way
- Hong Kong Dance Company (1981), The Fringe Club (1982), Asian Art Festival (1982), Hong Kong Sinfonietta (1990) and other art organisations were found during this period
- It is noteworthy that the government only targeted 'high performing arts' such as theatre, ballet or orchestra, arguably because of the superiority of Western culture
- There was no vision or future planning on cultural development (It was not necessary because the British governance ended in 1997)



Hong Kong Sinfonietta

CULTURAL POLICY IN HONG KONG SAR (1997 – TODAY)

- In stead of saying ‘there is no cultural policy’, which the Hong Kong Government often mentioned and being proud of, Chin wan (2008), a cultural policy researcher, agued that Hong Kong government has an ‘unarticulated’ cultural policy
- However, he admitted that because of the difference in cultural, economic and administration background, it failed to demonstrate the objective of ‘rule without rules’ .



Chin Wan in his new books release presentation, 2017



Left: Chin Wan took picture with a passerby, 2017

CULTURAL POLICY IN HONG KONG SAR (1997 – TODAY)

- Without protection from the government policy, the growth of commercial activities endangered the public sphere and public goods (e.g. privatisation of public service, gentrifications)
- Also, the restructuring of the Hong Kong SAR government: the power of district councils were shifted to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department from art development into art management, arguably it was the end of cultural democracy
- Together with administrators' bad artistic judgment and bureaucracy, the authorities failed to promote and nurture the cultural activities in Hong Kong

EXAMPLES OF BAD ARTISTIC JUDGMENT AND BUREAUCRACY

In 1995, The Obscene Articles Tribunal deemed a picture of Michelangelo's statue, David in a newspaper advertisement to be indecent.

Later the decision was overruled by the supreme court that the judge said such a ruling would make the British colony 'the laughingstock of the world'.



David

EXAMPLES OF BAD ARTISTIC JUDGMENT AND BUREAUCRACY

- The 'Not Allowed Park' in Hong Kong



No eat and drink in the park
No clothes drying allowed
No noise allowed



No running in the park



No ball games



No skateboarding
No cycling
No step on grass
No dogs allowed
No sleeping
No gambling

CULTURAL POLICY IN HONG KONG SAR (1997 – TODAY)

- After the financial crisis in 2008, the Hong Kong government was determined to diversify our economic structure, as a response to the 'new economic order'
- The cultural policy then shifted into a culture and creative industries' policy because of economic motives
- The government promoted these sectors by, for example, providing start-up funding, exploring overseas' markets, providing an infrastructure and creative hub, but mostly, it allowed the industries to operate with market mediate logics

CULTURAL POLICY IN HONG KONG SAR (1997 – TODAY)

- The natural selection by the market, thus, filtered lots of art practices with less economic potentials, and the neoliberal logics were also hard to justify, for example, heritage conservation and protection for historical and cultural artefacts with less economic values
- Despite the thriving statistics in GDP contribution and employment figures, art cultivation and participation did not witness popular growth in Hong Kong as the data suggested



*Queen's Pier in Hong Kong,
demolished in 2008*

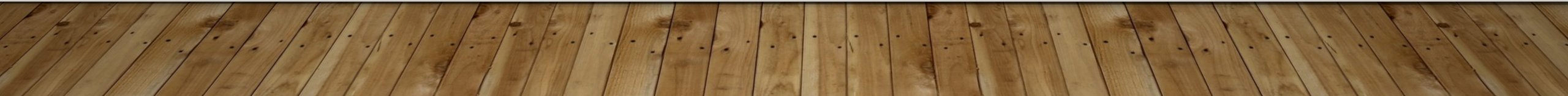
SUMMARY

- No cultural policy before 1967: Cultural activities only involved social elites
- After the leftist riot in 1967, cultural events were initiated to comfort the public and celebrate prosperity;
- The colonial government (seemed to be) non-interventional to commercial cultural production to distinct itself from the communist bloc
- With the success of 'Hong Kong Art Festival', the colonial government started to invest in districts council and art organisations: 'reactive policy began'

SUMMARY

- The government did not comment to invest in art groups in a long run, very often these organisations have to compete for space, funding and audience
- Most of the resources went to 'high performing art' , other cultural community had to move to industrial area to escape the high rent
- Over the past decades the government (both colonial and SAR government) deliberately tune down the importance of art appreciation and artistic judgment for easy administration
- The results is causing a narrow art spectrum in Hong Kong, low cultural dignity of Hong Kong people and even lost in direction in cultural development in the society

**DISCUSSIONS:
IF YOU WERE THE GOVERNOR OF HONG KONG**



CASE FOR DISCUSSIONS : CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

- According to a survey by Hong Kong Arts Development Council (2010), they interviewed 803 art practitioners and orgainsation, and 587 (73%) of them are using industrial building as their primary working place
- The units were mainly used for purposes of workshop/studio/production house (69.6%), rehearsal (44.2%) and storage (30.9%).About one-third of users opened their units to public



Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre

CASE FOR DISCUSSIONS : CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS

- However, under the current land regulation, all art and cultural activities inside industrial buildings are illegal
- In May 2017, an indie music club 'Hidden Agenda' inside an old industrial buildings were raided by police and all members were arrested, including 4 British musicians
- Should these 'illegal' cultural activities be allowed? How should cultural activities be regulated?



Hidden Agenda, a live music venue in an industrial building

CASE FOR DISCUSSIONS : WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICTS

- The West Kowloon Cultural District will be developed into one of the world's largest cultural quarters, blending art, education and public space
- Xiqu (Chinese Opera) Centre : £27 million
- Contemporary art museum 'M+' is operated by international collectors, but arguably it has no connection with the public (it becomes a copycat of the International Quarter London)
- Hong Kong Palace Museum: the third Palace Museum in Greater China
- Altogether it costs £4,46 million, how does it help in nurturing Hong Kong Culture? Where should the government stand in nurturing local culture and bringing in foreign culture?



Xiqu Centre



West Kowloon Cultural District

CASE FOR DISCUSSIONS: AUNTIE'S GOT TALENT (BUT PEOPLE DON'T LIKE IT)

- Originally from China, the 'freestyle mass dance' has become more and more popular in Hong Kong
- Dance in your own style, no practice needed, just for your own enjoyment
- 'so old fashioned' and 'noise making'
- Should we stop such mass dance in Hong Kong? What is the rationale behind?
- How do these discussions related to cultural policy?



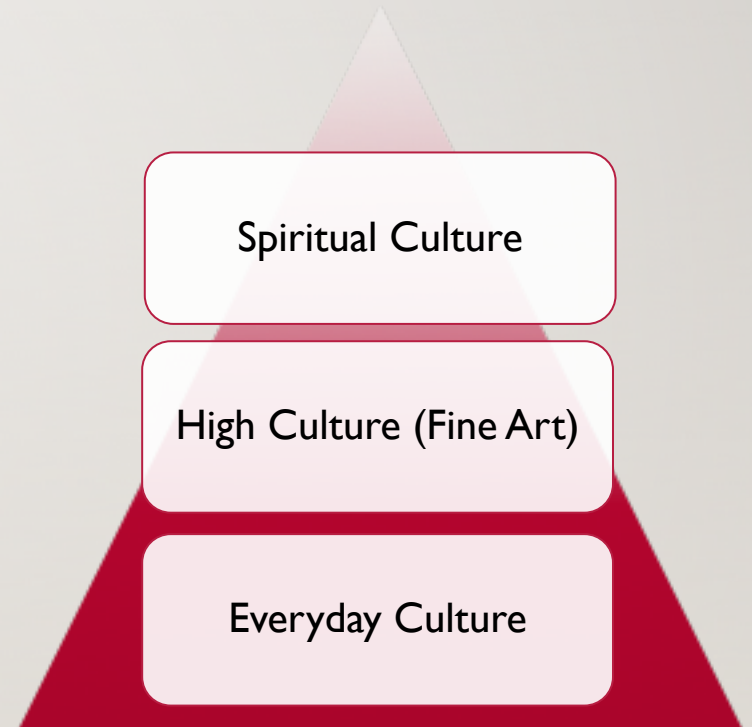
Freestyle dancer in Mong Kok



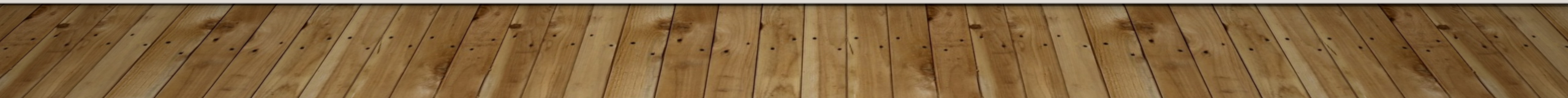
'So noisy, it is so loud, too loud'

HOW DOES THESE DEBATES RELATE TO CULTURAL POLICY?

- Everyday culture: law and regulations on cultural activities and how to locate cultural resources in our society?
- High culture: what types of art should we fund? And why? For whom?
- Spiritual culture: the instinct of art and taste, good and bad, how to critic art, and the spirit of art and cultural activities



Q & A



THANK YOU

